97-84107-22

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London

1875

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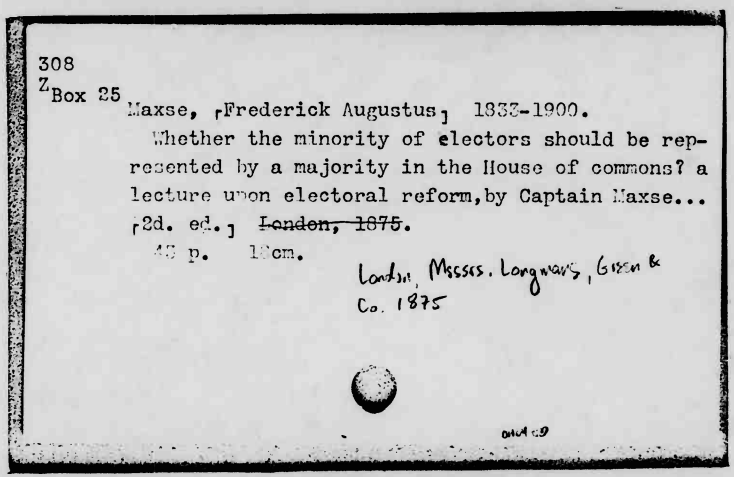
308
Z Box 25 Maxse, [Frederick Augustus] 1833-1900.
Whether the minority of electors should be represented by a majority in the House of commons? a lecture upon electoral reform, by Captain Maxse... [2d. ed.] ~~London, 1875~~.
43 p. 18cm.
London, Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. 1875

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 9:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 6/4/97 INITIALS: TLM

TRACKING # : 24806

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WHETHER THE MINORITY OF ELECTORS SHOULD BE REPRESENTED BY A MAJORITY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS?

308 Z Box 25

A LECTURE

UPON

Electoral Reform

BY CAPTAIN MAXSE, R.N.

TOPICS:—*The Interest of the Poor. The Use of Political Power. The State Exists Notwithstanding. Misrepresentative High Class Journalism. Our Public Flatterers. The Effect of Reiteration. The "Governing" Boroughs. A Democratic Blunder. The Decline of Public Spirit. Single Woman Suffrage. A Self-adjusted Halter. Reformers' Illusions. Human Progress not Inevitable.*

SECOND EDITION.

London:
P. S. KING, PARLIAMENTARY BOOKSELLER,
KING STREET, WESTMINSTER.
1875.
PRICE SIXPENCE.

WHETHER THE MINORITY OF ELECTORS SHOULD BE REPRESENTED BY A MAJORITY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS?

A LECTURE

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CAPTAIN MAXSE, R.N.

The splendid outcome of our Parliamentary System is that a minority of Electors appoint a majority of Members of Parliament, and the majority of Electors appoint their minority to be steadily out-voted and beaten.

P. S. KING,
Parliamentary Bookseller,
KING STREET, WESTMINSTER, LONDON.

1875.

The following Lecture was delivered during the winter at the Beaumont Institute, in the Tower Hamlets. It is now published with some additional matter and corrections.

Mn. 25, 1916-03

Electoral Reform.

The interest of the Poor.

The subject I have come to address you upon is that of Electoral Reform. I will endeavour to place myself in sympathy with you, by frankly explaining why I am interested myself, and am so anxious to interest you, in this question of Electoral Reform. It is because I believe that in dealing with it I go to one of the root causes of much of our social misery. It is my fate not to be content with the gaudy superficial side of our civilization. I cannot with any satisfaction confine myself to gazing on the façade of our social fabric, or luxuriate tranquilly in its front apartments: my mind always travels inevitably to the rear of the superstructure, and surveys the immense area of dilapidated buildings where the human race may be said to be, whose life represents one long struggle for the mere means of existence. Now, though I speak of fate, I am not a Fatalist; and I would warn you

against the spirit of fatalism which is now, under the doctrine of Natural Development, creeping over the whole face of society. Every wise man must perceive the inexorable limits which arise from natural conditions—but he will not admit the inexorable character of *artificial* conditions which are imposed by the selfishness or by the error of man. My labour as a politician is directed towards what seem to me to be the preventible causes of human suffering. If there are in this country during a single year no less than 5,000,000 people who are, at some time in it, either paupers or alms receivers, that terrible fact is largely due in my opinion to artificial conditions and circumstances, which result from human institutions and which come within the province of the legislature to improve or remove. The leaders of the two factions, Whig and Tory, who govern the country by means of political power, are constantly at pains to convince working men that there is no value in political power; and certainly, observing the obstacles they place in the way of working men possessing political power, there is every reason to believe that they are perfectly sincere. They value political power themselves too much to concede it to others. I wish to impress on you the value of political power. Political power affords the means

of improving bad circumstances, which create poverty, and which are nevertheless wilfully preserved by politicians who only represent those who are in good circumstances.

A bad land system, in spite of the amiability of landowners, makes bad circumstances, and by depriving people of the means of industry, creates poverty. It is political power in the hands of the few which upholds this bad land system, and agricultural labourers who are without political power mainly suffer from it.

Do you think if agricultural labourers had possessed power during the last 150 years—combined with an intelligence sharpened by a National system of education—that seven million acres of public commons would have disappeared? Would they not have said through their representatives "If these 7,000,000 acres are to be appropriated, they must be leased from the State in farms suitable to small cultivators as well as to large cultivators." What is it that has reduced agricultural labourers to their present condition? It is want of education and a bad land system. How is it that this land system, which every political teacher from Adam Smith to Mill has in vain condemned, remains in full blight? It is because those who are interested in its alteration have had no political power.

Again, a bad education system, which results in producing only 50,000 children who can read and write fluently out of 3,000,000 children who are, or who ought to be at school—(these figures are taken from last year's report of the Committee of Council)—is a fertile cause of bad circumstances, and represents a patent process for manufacturing paupers. It is political power in the hands of a few which has so long preserved this bad education system. I might add "Indirect Taxation," which takes one-tenth of a working man's income, and one hundredth of a rich man's income[1]; this goes to aggravate the depressing circumstances which surround the labouring class.

Believe me, you are deceived by interested politicians or by superficial thinkers when you are told that political power cannot benefit your condition.

I am one of those who believe there is such a thing as the State: I should be amused if I were not saddened by observing the ingenious efforts which are made—now that there is a distant prospect of the State becoming a popular power—

[1] This is an approximate statement which can be easily verified by whoever takes the trouble to study the incidence of taxation.

on the part of certain Economists to prove that there is no such thing as the State at all, that it is entirely a fiction, that it never did any harm—not even when Louis XIV. appropriated executive power, declaring "I am the State," and while he exulted in the glory of wars, whose perils he never shared, and revelled in luxury, left his famished peasantry by hundreds of thousands to satisfy their hunger on the bark of trees—and that there is nothing to be obtained from it. The State hitherto has been a terrible entity. Has not the English State—in other words the English executive power—committed great crimes? Has it not in olden times burnt and gibbeted patriots by the hundred, ay! by the thousand, whose only fault was that they loved their fellow men too well to remain silent under oppression? Has it not within the Century waged iniquitous wars for which our forefathers bled and for which we pay? Does not poor Hodge, who now shivers under the hedge, pay[1] for the war waged by Pitt and the English aristocracy to suppress French democratic institutions? Has it not and does it not now imprison men at home within crushing adverse artificial circumstances? But says M. Bastiat and his school of Economists, "it can

[1] By indirect Taxation.

never do any good." Well, it will be at least something to prevent its doing harm: but I go further and declare that it may be an active agent, if used within wise limits, for doing good.

The Representation of Public Opinion.

But where is the force to come from which shall compel the State to act in the interest of the many? It can only be derived from public opinion. I think you will sustain me in saying that there is now a considerable amount of public opinion which is favourable to the alteration of the land system, and to the removal of many artificial oppressive conditions. It is impossible to hold a meeting in any great town without discovering that there is much active public opinion favourable to the initiative of the State in many measures of reform. But there exists no channel for the expression of this opinion. It is not represented in the powerful organs of the press, and it is not represented in Parliament.

The powerful organs of the press are, I take it, the London Daily Papers. Their object is to obtain the largest circulation among the people who can afford a daily paper, that is among the upper and middle classes. They are, first of all, huge advertising sheets—an advertisement being

far more precious to them than the opinion of a hundred thousand workmen: indeed, this opinion they will rarely condescend to publish, lest it should disturb the average mind of the daily newspaper public: it will pay a high class organ far better to misrepresent this opinion than to give it honest utterance. All radical speech is systematically suppressed in them[1]. Independent thought has no sale. The very conditions of successful high class journalism depend upon a strict compliance with fashion and with commonplace: not the fashion and commonplace of a

[1] A case has lately occurred which opportunely illustrates the character of high-class journalism. A friend of mine sent one of our leading Liberal organs a brief account of a disgraceful attempt by the Church authorities at Blandford to silence the speakers at an agricultural labourers' meeting by pealing the Church bells overhead; this communication passed to the editor's waste-paper basket. Within a couple of days of this, a noble peer favoured the same journal with a communication upon the more interesting subject of the turf. This last letter was immediately accorded the honor of large type and a prominent position. There can be no doubt but what the Editor acted in these instances sagaciously as far as the interest of his journal was concerned. Lord A.'s letter was a capital advertisement for subscribers to the high-class daily journal, while my friend Mr. C.'s letter would have only introduced a distasteful subject, and could not possibly have attracted profitable attention. If I refer to this, it is not in order to reflect upon the Editor, whose first duty is towards his paper, but for the purpose of showing that high-class journals are more likely to be high-class organs than national organs.

people, but the fashion and commonplace of the moneyed class. Now we cannot—I for my part do not—blame the proprietors and editors of the daily newspapers for endeavouring to make money out of journalism: we cannot expect them to publish their newspapers at a loss, but I do most emphatically repudiate their claim to represent either popular thought, or the best thought: and I found upon the misrepresentative character of high class journalism, an additional argument for *bonâ fide* parliamentary representation.

There has always been so much cant among our public men about our Glorious Constitution and privileges that the popular delusion has been established that the people of this country have already got political representation. But as no amount of self-glorification can establish the claim of an individual to be considered virtuous, so no amount of national self panegyric indulged by cabinet ministers at a Mansion House banquet can establish true national greatness or representative institutions. There has never been in this country so perfect a master of rhetoric as Edmund Burke. He declared our institutions of 1792 to be as perfect as human nature would permit. Yet at the time he spoke there was a place called Old Sarum, which consisted of three or four houses, and yet returned two Members of Parliament; and seventy members were returned by thirty-five places where there were hardly any voters at all. While he boasted of England's representative institutions, of her freedom, her liberty, and her law, six peers appointed (as they appointed the stewards of their establishments) forty-five members of the House of Commons—boroughs were put up to auction to the highest bidders, and Government was deliberately carried on by a system of bribery, the money being frequently provided by the king.

Now all Burke's specious rhetoric and agreeable flattery did not affect the fact that the Parliament of his time was—as a representative institution—a mere fraud, and owed its existence to the ignorance or helplessness of the people; and all Mr. Disraeli's eulogy of a system which has placed him in power does not affect the existing fact that the people of this country have not yet got, and, under the present electoral system never can have, genuine Parliamentary representation. Various reform acts have been obtained—unfortunately only under menace—from the governing classes, but it would seem to have been the effort of every Parliament hitherto, so to manipulate Reform Bills, as to *prevent* the majority of electors from having their rightful share of political power,—nay, more than this—it has

been so contrived, that the majority of electors are placed under the government of the minority.

If we lift up the gaudy drop-scene of the British Constitution, we shall readily perceive how this is done. The great mass of electors receive nominally a vote, but they have no voice in the selection of a candidate, and while the claim to a vote is impeded by many obstructions, it is found, when established, to command in the great towns but a fraction of the representative power which is conceded to voters who live in small boroughs or rural constituencies.

Minority Government.

In the following statement lies our impeachment of the existing electoral system—

30,000 Electors in small constituencies } elect 44 Members of Parliament,
546,000 Electors in large boroughs } elect 35 —— ditto, ——
therefore
30,000 Electors out-vote 546,000 Electors.

Then take this illustration:—At the last General Election, 18,000 Electors at Manchester, who recorded their votes in favour of a candidate, failed to return him, while another 18,000 Electors

who live in petty boroughs or rural constituencies[1] were permitted to seat no less than 30 legislators! The result of this constitutional system is that we are governed by a minority. The splendid outcome of our parliamentary system is that a minority of Electors appoint a majority of Members of Parliament, and the majority of Electors appoint their minority to be steadily out-voted and beaten, and all the while statesmen and journalists vie with one another in national brag, and tell the deluded people that they are blessed above all other peoples in their institutions and their laws. And the story is circulated so persistently that at last, as people are ultimately convinced by a perpetual advertisement, they think that it is even so,

> For say a foolish thing but oft enough,
> (And here's the secret of a hundred creeds,
> Men get opinions as boys learn to spell,
> By re-iteration chiefly), the same thing
> Shall pass at last for absolutely wise,
> And not with fools exclusively.

[1] "Mr. Dawson Damer, the member for Portarlington, once across the Irish Channel, may ride himself and all his supporters to St. Stephen's in a couple of omnibuses. Mr. Damer's supporters number no more than 76! The men who returned Mr. Disraeli are individually more than six times as powerful as the unsuccessful supporters of Mr. Jacob Bright. The voters at Petersfield and Brecknock are each more than fifty times as strong as the electors of Manchester."—*Newcastle Chronicle.*

My voice may be just now a solitary one, and is only able to display its protest for a second on the monopolized hoardings; to-morrow it will be obliterated by the numerous quack placards with which you are familiar. Pompous abstractions, such as the "Public," and the "Country," will be invoked by interested time-servers and blind followers of routine, as authorities for unjust oligarchic government, and the great mass of people, either too busy, too selfish, or too lazy for reflection, will accept the juggle and submit to the wrong. And yet here—speaking where the great farce of our representative system finds its most telling illustration—surely it should be possible to arouse some public spirit, and to embody it in definite action. What is the parliamentary representation of the enormous population at this end of London? In the metropolitan boroughs of Hackney and the Tower Hamlets there are 70,000 electors who return four Members of Parliament. I can show you another 70,000 Electors, who, apparently for no other reason than that they live in constituencies which are manageable, return eighty Members of Parliament!

Is there any special virtue in the resident of a small borough that he should possess a hundred times, and in some instances two hundred times

the Parliamentary power that the resident in a large city has? Do we find more intelligence or public spirit prevailing in a pocket borough than in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, or London?

It is the small boroughs which are notoriously corrupt or servile. This is almost proved by the number of election trials which refer to them. The politics of the representative of Shaftesbury have been shown to depend entirely upon the caprice of a rich old lady who owns more than half the houses of the town. Let me reveal to you the character of another borough with which I am acquainted, situated in one of our southern counties. An election agent, intimate with the borough, being consulted as to the prospects of a Liberal candidate, wrote a letter in reply, from which I am permitted to select the following passages. He said:—

"In 1865 an Independent Liberal came forward and was received with a perfect ovation, he was cheered to the echo in every liberal sentiment he uttered. The resolution in his favour was carried without a word of dissent, but when he left the hall, small groups of voters were outside discussing the situation, and at length one acting as spokesman for the rest, approaching the candidate, touched his hat and said 'I beg your pardon, Sir, but what about the sugar?' The candidate replied that he had no sugar; as a consequence of this niggardly spirit, while his Conservative and Whig opponents obtained nearly 200 votes apiece, he was only able to reckon 25 votes. . . . . At the general Election of 1865, a section of Liberals adopted

the candidature of another Liberal, but he likewise declined to supply 'sugar,' and was disastrously beaten. The same thing occurred again this year. . . . . The leading Liberals are now looking forward to their old Whig member standing again, not because they have any confidence in his principles, but because he would comply with the indispensable and time honoured custom of supplying sugar."

I need hardly tell you that sugar is a euphemism for cash.

Stroud is a medium sized borough; it cannot be called a large town. It has 6,000 Electors, and returns the same number of legislators as the Tower Hamlets does with 33,000 Electors. We are so accustomed to Parliamentary insult that this sounds like a minor grievance. What the character of this provincial borough is we have had ample opportunity of learning. Here, says Mr. Baron Pigott, speaking of the last contest, "Bribery begat bribery of the worst kind . . . and perjury followed in its wake;" yet such is the deference shown to provincial politics, that Mr. Gladstone accepted the decision of Stroud as final evidence of the feeling of the country, and dissolved Parliament upon its adverse vote.

Many small boroughs are in reality nothing more than mere camps of the retainers of adjoining landlords. You are doubtless familiar with their appearance: you know that long street of shops, it is generally called High Street, owned by

obsequious tradesmen, who watch like spiders for the appearance of the carriages of the gentry, and dart out and humble themselves lowly and reverently for orders. These were the people who mobbed Mr. Odger at Reading, and who killed Joshua Davidson. No man of spirit can remain long in one of these places; he is a marked man. Yet these are the places which return members by the score to overwhelm the great borough representation.

It is one of the many illusions of Reformers, to suppose that, because the ballot affords protection to timid voters it must produce an independent vote. *The Ballot cannot create convictions.* Where there are no convictions the ballot is useless. Now political convictions are rare among the tenants of large estates, and camp retainers in general. Politicians do not sufficiently consider the emasculating effect of our system of land tenure. It is almost a condition of rural tenancy that the occupier is a Conservative or a non-politician, which is much the same thing. By this means the rural districts become peopled by political dependents, and Conservative journalists triumphantly exclaim—see how Conservative the country is! Do we not often read of some county election, where the nominee of a few great land-owners is brought forward and elected a

Member of Parliament without opposition? Is this surprising when all independent politicians are virtually banished? Yet the constituencies which are most subject to the paralyzing effect of our system of land tenure are those which are over represented.

We find that

14,000 Electors in rural Buckingham } return 8 Membrs of Parlt.
while
53,000 Electors in Birmingham } return but 3 —— do. ——

and there is the same contrast between rural Berkshire and Manchester.

Now Mr. Disraeli, whose position is mainly owing to the art with which he creates theoretical difficulties to impede progress, when this subject was last discussed in the House of Commons, threw up as usual a cloud of dust to conceal the real issue. He declared that the boroughs were over represented; so they are if we confuse, as he confused, small boroughs with large boroughs, but something like 150 of these boroughs are not entitled to separate representation. We suffer from over representation of small boroughs, and under representation of large boroughs.

Added to the anomalies of our representative system are the difficulties placed in the way of

registration—the tax upon poor candidates for official expenses—the correspondence of the hours of polling with the hours of work—the inequality of the suffrage in town and county—and the sham lodger franchise which keeps the lodger without a vote[1]. It will not be necessary to dilate upon these grievances—the important question is, how are they to be remedied?

A Democratic Blunder.

There are already symptoms, I regret to say, that certain well-meaning, but old-fashioned, one-idea'd Democratic speakers, among whom are some of my friends, are about to lead some of their followers off upon the wrong scent by starting, and giving prominence to the old cry for suffrage extension. And I must take this opportunity of entering my strongest protest against the policy which has been recently pursued by a certain portion of the London Democracy, acting under bad advice. Now the leaders of this section, I am aware, mean well, but they are gradually bringing the London Democracy into thorough disrepute, and weaken its power for good. The conduct I complain of is this:—Certain persons who are unable themselves

[1] See Appendix, p. 42.

to get up meetings which will command attention, spend their time in doing their utmost to ruin the meetings of reformers who are just as sincere as they are, and, in the matter of wisdom, possibly more advanced. They come to the meeting—accompanied by a tail—and get up with an air of unimpeachable virtue, to propose an amendment embodying some extravagant proposal, upon the abstract principle of which, as an ultimate goal, the majority of the meeting are probably agreed. Now this system has been pursued so steadily of late that large political meetings in the Metropolis have become fewer and fewer, and we are compelled to look to other towns to undertake the agitation which is so sadly needed. It is difficult to get any politician of weight to attend a London public meeting—the very best men and some of the truest friends of progress have become entirely disheartened. Only this year, at Chelsea, a meeting held under the auspices of Sir Charles Dilke, in favour of household suffrage in the counties, was spoilt—to the delight of Tories and Whigs—in precisely the same way as the Electoral Reform Meeting at the Freemasons' Tavern was spoilt last November. In the same manner all movements on behalf of Land Tenure Reform have been rendered abortive by wild amendments in favour of raw schemes which are scouted by the community.

Not even the reputation of John Stuart Mill—not even his unswerving devotion to the cause of the proletariate—was sufficient to save him from this treatment at the Freemasons' Hall on the part of a couple of raw politicians, one of whom was not even able to express himself in decent English. I say that if there be any dignity or wisdom in the London Democracy it will give no encouragement to such insane behaviour in future. I am well aware that in thus expressing myself I am likely to offend some of my friends; but I have never yet been accused of adjusting my opinions with a view to popularity, and I shall not commence to do so now. If a Radical plays the game of a Tory, it is necessary to admonish him.

I, for my part, must decline to acknowledge any infallible mouth-piece of Democracy, and I yield my claim to no one as an interpreter of its true interest. I am aware that there is a superstition among certain fanatics that generous thought can only exist in a working man, and that a man must either have plied his awl, driven his gimlet, or hammered his anvil so many times, or have carried so many sacks of coal to and fro, per day, in order to qualify him for correct political judgment. Now every one who knows me knows that few people have been at the pains to defend working-class politicians than I have; but because

I wish to see them receive fair play, and would do my utmost to secure their return to the House of Commons, I must protest against the bigotry and cant which sets up a spurious exclusive standard of virtue, and indulges in the aristocratic vice of despising all those who are outside a privileged order.

Let me tell you that it is a very easy thing for a working man to be a radical, especially in a large town where individual politics are lost in the crowd: in becoming a radical, he obtains popularity in his class, sympathy from his family, and frequently a road for ambition. But it is a very different thing with the man belonging to the upper or middle class who espouses radicalism. For him there are only cold looks from wondering friends—perhaps alienation from those who are dear—while parliamentary and public life are closed to him on account of his principles, and in some cases, a fortune is sacrificed in their defence. I have heard that Ernest Jones deliberately sacrificed a fortune of £.2000 a year, offered by an uncle, rather than desert his principles. Speaking personally, I may say that I have done nothing but lose money ever since I have taken to politics, and that I should have been in parliament a dozen years ago if I could have simulated Conservative or Whig principles. The upper or middle class man, as far as my experience

goes, most frequently loses by radicalism: the working class radical, though there are many cases of sacrifice on his part, is likely to obtain some personal distinction by his politics, and certainly he is never called upon to brave unpopularity in his own class. These observations may be worth the consideration of those who make grand claims to superiority of motive founded upon their present or previous connection with the Labour Class. If manual labour is to be regarded as the conclusive test of political wisdom, we must go where we find most of it, and shall be called upon to recognise a distinction between the coalheaver and the mechanic. I submit that what we want to represent us is mind—generous mind which is in sympathy with the wants of those who toil and suffer. Let us take this mind, without prejudice or suspicion, whether it be discovered beneath fine linen or beneath a fustian jacket.

Manhood Suffrage.

Now about the suffrage. I am quite prepared to join in a vote for manhood suffrage, as I would in a vote for universal justice, but having done this I insist upon passing on to practical progressive measures. I believe manhood suffrage (I regret that manhood does not date from the age of twenty-

three) is a wise and just basis for a national system of representation, but I do not believe it is to be obtained by resolutions in its favour passed by a few people who are, rightly or wrongly, without any perceptible influence upon practical politics. Democratic societies have been passing resolutions in this country in favour of adult suffrage or the whole of this century, and without producing the slightest effect. If you will study political history for the last sixty years, that is since the peace, you will find that the demand for manhood suffrage has diminished rather than increased. Once you had members of the House of Commons who brought forward resolutions in its favour—where are your members now? Pray do not think that I rejoice over this failure. I am only anxious that you should derive a profitable lesson from it. It is not sufficient to believe in a cause to make the cause succeed. Enthusiasm is a most valuable quality, but unless it be united with wisdom, it is a wasted force. It is not enough to feel strongly that a thing is right in order to obtain it. Good causes perish by the score. It is not improbable that the best ones have hitherto failed. There is no sadder thought, amid the many sad thoughts of this world, than that of the utter waste of valuable human energy upon some of the highest causes.

And yet to succeed we must believe in the righteousness of a cause. "Be just and fear not" is a splendid motto, but we should consider how far we can impart to others our sense of what justice is. And this is what many reformers fail to do.

Their egregious and (as far as progress is concerned) their fatal error consists in imagining that the majority of people care for politics as they do. For every man in this hall interested in politics, there are 200 outside who do not know what politics mean. You think they ought to care for manhood suffrage and for national questions; unfortunately their whole interest is absorbed in personal pursuits and private affairs. Public spirit has been steadily on the decline for many years. The time is by no means one when radical politicians can afford to quarrel.

My opinion is that a fatal mistake will be made if we raise the cry of manhood suffrage, instead of that of Electoral Reform. The nearest approach to manhood suffrage lies through Electoral Reform[1]. The apathy and political indifference of

[1] We place representation above—and as a means to—all desirable enfranchisement. Herein lies the difference between ourselves and friends. They commit the error of supposing that enfranchisement means representation.

society is such that no one will pay the slightest attention to a demand for manhood suffrage. The strong point of the Electoral Reform programme is that we base our demand upon a suffrage which is theoretically conceded. Household suffrage in the counties—which forms a portion of it—is the mere complement of the present system. I confess, however, that I am not very sanguine as to the effect of the peasant vote: when men are in a necessitous condition and are not sufficiently educated to form an independent judgment, they will be under the influence of those who can relieve their immediate wants; and I bear in mind the effect of the peasant vote in France and the oppression of the towns by means of it. Mr. Arch's movement has not, I fear, affected the great bulk of agricultural labourers. I maintain that a radical alteration of our representative system will have a far greater result than any mere extension of the suffrage, though the least we can ask is that the lodger franchise shall be made into a genuine one. At present, I believe, not 2 per cent. of the lodgers in the metropolis have obtained the franchise, which has been nominally accorded to them; we advocate the compulsory registration by the parochial officers of all voters, and the limitation of the residential qualification to six months. It

strikes me that if we obtain this, the suffrage in the metropolis will approximate closely to manhood suffrage. It may be necessary here to make some remarks upon a subject which is likely to be one of serious dissension:—I refer to woman suffrage. I think that some of those who pretend to lead the Democracy have been singularly at fault upon this question.

Woman Suffrage.

The only form in which the Woman Suffrage question is before the country consists in a proposal that propertied widows, spinsters, or detached ladies shall have the vote. I have always said, and all the figures I have been able to study have confirmed my statement, that the effect of this will be largely to increase the representation of the Upper and Middle Classes, and that the representation of the Working Classes will be proportionately diminished. There is a still greater evil behind it which appears never to have been considered by some of our simple-minded democrats. If Mr. Jacob Bright's Bill, or Mr. Forsyth's, were to become law—as non-residence does not in county constituencies create a disqualification—not only would the Working Class be placed at the disadvantage I have mentioned, but

rich men would at once be enabled to enfranchise their wives or other ladies of their families by securing to them, at a small cost, the necessary qualification for voting, and we should then have this precious result—the rich man would present himself at the polling booth accompanied by a cluster of lady votes, and the poor man, who is not burthened with spare property, would bring his single vote. Are you prepared to declare that this would be just, or a measure favourable to the Democracy?

I have recently called the attention of one or two working class leaders to this unpleasant prospect, and they have admitted that they had not considered the point. Then I say, what business have men to undertake the guidance of others before they have thoroughly considered the measures which they advocate? They have endeavoured to escape from their dilemma by advocating total womanhood suffrage, but I ask those who are sane whether there is the slightest prospect of their obtaining in the present generation even a consideration of such a proposal? All that they will do will be to strengthen the lesser demand; they will get the part but never the whole. This might be wise if the part represented a proportion of value—an instalment of the whole. But in this case the part represents but a sour morsel, which

might be swallowed as a part of the whole, but which taken alone is a fatal dose.

And this reminds me of a doctrine in vogue among certain Radicals to which I cannot subscribe. It is that it is always necessary to ask for more than you expect. Such a doctrine appears to me to be hardly honest, and of doubtful advantage. It is not honest to say that you want one thing when you mean another; and if it be once understood that the maximum demand is merely a flourish, in all probability a minimum concession will be deemed sufficient. Our forefathers were wiser in their generation when they called for "The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill." The demand made should be at once reasonable, just, and uncompromising; and speaking for the Electoral Reform Association I think I may say that we shall be satisfied with nothing less than the adoption of the whole of our programme.

It is somewhat amusing to observe the air of sublime magnanimity with which righteous Radicals arrange round their devoted necks the halter of woman suffrage. It will serve them perfectly right if the women pass a law directly they have power compelling them all to go to church twice each Sunday. I must congratulate the ladies upon the dexterity with which they have worked

this question. They come on the soft side of Radicals and coax them by appeals to abstract rights, and having conquered here, they sidle up to the Conservative with a whisper about the "rights of property," and the additional representation of property obtained by their measure. And so the Radical gets his bone, says that he likes it, and brandishes it aloft with pride, declaring that he will increase the power of oppression for the sake of eternal justice. And the Conservative appreciates the argument, and perceives his solid plum. The opportunity of class legislation under the circumstance of Radical connivance is too rare to be missed. Mr. Forsyth's Bill is now obtaining considerable support among the Conservatives, and it is quite possible that it may soon become law, when an additional means will be afforded of class oppression.

I have not time this evening to discuss the question of Woman Suffrage at length, and shall confine myself to a very few remarks. I am opposed to it on the ground of principle and policy. To give women the right of imposing laws—or of assisting to impose laws—on men, maintained by State power, is to invert a Natural Law. The Natural Law is this:—that women are, like minors, though in a superior degree, dependent for protection on men[1]. Why do not women concede the right of voting to minors?—solely and properly on the ground of expediency—yet they protest against the doctrine of expediency being applied in their case.

Women who are dissatisfied with their dependence on men should get up a meeting against Nature, and adopt a resolution impeaching the system of creation. It is true that women have—as men have—many wrongs, but their remedy lies not in their political hostility to men, but in their emancipation from superstition and in the exercise of their natural influence. We must not regard the few radical women who come forward in this movement as the genuine representatives of their sex. They have—I say it without disrespect—*masculine* minds. They misrepresent women when they ask for votes. The overwhelming majority of women in this country are indifferent to or are opposed to Woman Suffrage; and

[1] The advocates of Woman Suffrage are always arguing from the exception. They compare George Eliot or Harriet Martineau with the average male elector, and triumphantly point to the contrast; and because I have said that women are physically dependent on men, Sir Robert Anstruther, M.P., undertakes to produce a Scotch fish woman who would walk me "to death in five minutes." I should have thought it was unnecessary to say that my argument throughout applies to women *collectively*.

these ladies are necessarily absent from all discussions—they acquiesce in representation through men; on this ground I claim to represent them equally with Miss Lydia Becker. Of course the stereotyped retort is that slaves never wish to be free. I do not believe they are "enslaved" in the proper sense of this term, and so far am I from believing that political enfranchisement will free them, I am disposed to say it will, as far as their influence is felt in legislation, tend rather to enslave them more—for women are by nature timid, and disposed to lean on positive dogmas and positive authority. They are therefore opposed to progress and essentially Conservative. They will accept the vote if it is forced upon them by their radical sisters, and support all arbitrary and enslaving measures.

There is this to be said and very much more, which I will reserve for another occasion. I am content for the present to leave the Woman Suffrage advocates tied to this dilemma. Their movement assumes at present but one practical form—namely, a demand for increased Upper and Middle Class representation; if they support this they injure the political interest of the Working Class; if they make the larger demand of total Womanhood Suffrage, they will still more strengthen the present proposal, and though they

may satisfy their consciences by a magnificent declaration of right, they must be well aware that they pursue an illusion.

I will now submit to your consideration the

Programme

of the Electoral Reform Association, which is founded upon the arguments I have addressed to you. Our articles run thus:—

1. Uniformity of Suffrage in Boroughs and Counties, and a genuine Lodger Franchise.
2. Equality of Representation, to be secured by a re-distribution of seats, and re-arrangement of Electoral Districts.
3. Compulsory Registration by parochial officers.
4. Extension of the hours of polling in large towns.
5. Candidates to be relieved from Official Expenses.
6. Shorter Parliaments[1].

[1] I should like "The Payment of Members" as an additional article. The arguments in favour of this measure appear to me to be quite unanswerable, and they have been ably expressed by Mr. P. A. Taylor, M.P., but the English mind has not yet even considered it; and it is not likely to do so until Mr. Taylor has received—by means of Electoral Reform—a large increase of supporters. We should not benefit the proposal by including it in our programme, and were we to do so, should render the latter more difficult of acceptance.

The most important, and the most complicated of these demands, is No. 2. How can we best obtain Equality of Representation and government by the majority? We must bear in mind that the strongest argument against all Parliamentary Reform, is that there is no popular project for the representation of minorities, but we are perfectly ready to accord that, if the system of *Government* by minorities be abolished, the *representation* of minorities shall be secured. At present this system is reversed, and the majority of electors in the country represented as a minority in the legislature is out-voted and governed by the over-representation of the minority!

As far as I am aware, no scheme has ever been proposed equal to that of proportional and preferential representation, a scheme identified with the name of Mr. Hare, and which has been, with valuable modifications, embodied in a bill brought forward by Mr. Walter Morrison: the object of the bill is threefold. It is to give facility for the self-grouping of Electors, power to the majority, and representation to the minority. My desire is to obtain representation in proportion to the number of Electors. I claim such representation for the Radicals. Our party is a large one, but it is

broken up by limited geographical areas[1] and by the nefarious electoral system. If Mr. Walter Morrison's bill became law, there would be a hundred *bonâ fide* radicals placed in the House, and this would be at least sufficient to prevent a "count out." The motto of our movement is "Representation in the legislature." We leave to others the barren cry of mere enfranchisement in the constituencies.

The Duty of Reformers.

Before I draw my lecture to a close, let me, however, urge upon all those who desire to advance the welfare of their fellow creatures, for this I take it is the object of every real Reformer,

> "One who seeks his own
> In all men's good—"

let me urge upon them the necessity of practising some tolerance towards each other. We want a little more self-sacrifice, and a little less self-assertion; we want mutual concession in

[1] Probably 200,000 electors in the country would have supported Mr. Mill, had they been able to do so, when this eminent man last stood for Parliament, but a hundred or so of peopel because they lived in Westminster, were sufficient to exclude him from the Legislature.

the interest of a great cause. Let us travel together in strict alliance as far as we can. Remember, that in the whole system of vegetation, no two leaves have as yet been found which are of a similar pattern; far less can we expect to find accurate resemblance between two human beings; there is always a diverging point, and the thought of each earnest thinker is to him the best. And let us learn from the past and consider how mournful a collection might be made of the illusions of sanguine Reformers.

Their mistake consists in attributing to the world a latent conformity with their own idealism. But the world, and especially the unimaginative English world, is without any social vision; its only ideal is relegated to another world. Most people are unfortunately satisfied with the external surface of things; it is only the thoughtful who examine beneath; hence a form of selfishness is engendered which arises from merely considering immediate effects. National questions are distasteful and troublesome, and are buried in petty pursuits. The common Englishman is a Lotos eater, who seeks in the repose of his arm-chair oblivion of his country, exclaiming,

> "Let me alone. What pleasure can I have
> To war with evil? Is there any peace
> In ever climbing up the climbing wave"

Shouts for abstract rights, unless there be real power behind them, advance no cause. Consider how stationary certain questions have been for the last fifty years. Here is a description given by Harriet Martineau of the position of the State Church forty years ago, which might be written to-day:—

"The Church really was at that time in great danger. The High Churchmen and Dissenters were almost equally discontented at its connection with the State, and the intermediate parties were dissatisfied with its condition, and alarmed at its prospects."

In 1835 and '37 the reform of the House of Lords was a prominent public question. In 1845 we appeared to have reached just that pitch of indignation which would have settled the Game Laws. The *Morning Herald*, in the autumn of that year, announced that Ministers were fully aware of the pernicious operation of the Game Laws, and were contemplating a complete revision of them. Well, then there were the Land and Labour League Societies—I mean the Land and Labour League Societies of 1816—known as the Spencean Societies, which were founded by an honourable enthusiast of the name of Spence, the object of the organization being to cause all the lands of the country to become the property of the

State. These Societies had branches in various towns, and held frequent meetings in London, where fervent uncompromising resolutions were passed, and hearts beat high with intense conviction and earnestness. Have they left even a trace of their work?

I do not refer to the blank results which followed these hopeful times, or to the failure of generous efforts with a view to disheartening you. I am happy to think that

> "Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

I only wish to call your attention to a prodigious waste of splendid energy, and ask you to consider whether there may not have been some error of method in the course which has been pursued by reformers hitherto. May it not be well to blend some sagacity with our ardour? Should we not take into consideration the character of the social material by which we are surrounded? Is it not necessary when we are agreed in the main as to object, to endeavour to combine instead of dividing our strength? Have we not a duty towards the poor, whose brief we hold, and whose case we may mismanage?

The Electoral Reform Association has been started at considerable cost and trouble to the promoters. Public spirit is so rare in this country, that every motive except that of public spirit will in all probability be attributed to us. If you only knew by experience in practical agitation how difficult it is to interest people in a subject that they do not find mentioned in Reuter's telegrams, or discussed in the daily journals, you would indeed wonder that any public movement is started at all—much more that any Radical movement is started—for Radical movements do not attract wealth. There are many people to whom a public meeting affords a means of agreeable excitement and who are ready to applaud; but the number of those who are prepared to put their hands in their pockets or to assist in the labour of organization is extremely small. I am sure I shall be borne out in this statement by every public-spirited man who is present.

I do not intend to indulge in any boastful prediction as to the probable success of our movement. It is one which the Moderates regard with unconcealed aversion; it would create a really National House, and would substitute a Liberal party founded upon principle for a Liberal party founded upon phrases. There is not one ex-Minister who would have anything to do with us; they have to cultivate popularity with the governing minority, and the governing minority, by whatever title it may label its respective factions, is essentially

Conservative. We appeal to the outside majority: those who form it must not, however, imagine that success comes of its own accord. Human progress is not quite so inevitable as it is the fashion to declare; if a people is not worthy of progress it will never obtain it. The object of this Association is one of great magnitude, but let us only find sufficient zeal, patriotism, and above all things wisdom in the majority we appeal to, and no amount of perseverance and patience shall be lacking on our part, either as leaders or as servants, to awaken the country to the support of a cause upon the success of which our national hopes may be said to depend.

Finally, I wish to impress on you that this question of Electoral Reform, or of obtaining political power, should be made to precede all others. What is the use of agitating on behalf of legislative measures when you have no control over the legislative machine? What is the use of your returning two members pledged to vote for the repeal of the "Criminal Law Amendment Act," for the alteration of the land system, or in favour of compulsory School Boards and free education, when 30 members are returned from the rural districts, representing the same number of votes as you have, pledged to oppose them? My advice to you—and I think you know I speak in

your interest—is to abandon all other questions entirely, and to concentrate the whole of your energy and industry upon the single object of obtaining just representation. When you have obtained this you will have political power. Till then, in vain you may form your political associations—in vain you may educate town populations to enlightened views and a sense of responsibility—and in vain you may squeeze in a genuine representative here and there, to be discarded at the next election—SHAM REPRESENTATION MUST EVER RESULT IN A SHAM PARLIAMENT.

APPENDIX.

Mr. Disraeli's Lodger Franchise.

A return recently laid before the House of Commons classifying the Parliamentary electors on the registers of the several boroughs in England and Wales in 1873, shows how few persons were on the registers as lodgers, though it was six years since the lodger franchise had been introduced. Of the 198 boroughs in England and Wales sending members to Parliament, there are 128 for which the return shows either no lodger voters at all or a number less than ten. Of the remaining 70 there are 48—again the majority—in which the number, though not less than ten, is under 50. There are but 22 boroughs in which the number is stated to reach or exceed 50, and they are as follows:—At Gloucester the return shows exactly 50 names on the register in respect of the lodger qualification, being rather more than one in 100 of the entire constituency; at Windsor, 51 of the whole 1,800 electors; at Cardiff, 52 of the 6,000; at Gravesend, 61 of the 2,800; at Hastings, 65 of the 3,000; at Southampton, 68 of the 6,500; at Hull, 73

of the 20,000; at Nottingham, 103 of the 15,000 at Cheltenham, 107 of the 4,400; at Devonport, 111 of the 3,400; at Bath, 127 of the 5,000; at Plymou 205 of the 5,600; at Bristol, 213 of the 22,000 at Liverpool, 316 of the 55,000. In the Metropolis the numbers are these:—In the City of London, 548 lodger voters in a constituency of 22,000; in Westminster (by far the largest number in any borough), 3,361 of the whole 20,000; in the Tower Hamlets, 152 in the whole 31,000; Hackney, 35 in 39,000; Finsbury, 517 in 37,000; Marylebone, 508 in 32,000; Chelsea, 1,275 in 23,000; Lambeth, 223 in 38,000; Southwark, 160 in 19,000; Greenwich, 47 in 16,000. There are very few lodger voters in the great towns in the North. At Manchester, only 29 in a constituency of 59,000; at Leeds, 13 in 44,000; at Sheffield, 2 in 34,000; at Bradford, 43 in 24,000; Oldham, 6 in 18,000. At Birmingham the return shows 10 in 51,000.

Printed by T. Brettell & Co. 51, Rupert Street,—W.

Directly, a Fourth Edition.

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The Causes of Social Revolt,

By CAPTAIN MAXSE, R.N.

Published by Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co.,
Paternoster Row.

Price One Shilling.

MSH 24806

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